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SUBJECT: SUNNI ARAB PROTEST GROUP MARAM MUCH BARKING, HOW MUCH BITE?

Classified By: PolCouns Robert Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. A variety of parties unhappy with the election results, including Allawi's and the major Sunni Arab blocs, met December 21-22 and issued a "Pact of Honor" under the name MARAM. They demanded an international investigation into the December 15 elections, as well as the formation of new elections. If these demands are not met, they have threatened to boycott the Council of Representatives. Some - but not all - of those in the Maram group have told the Embassy the demands are serious and the boycott threat real. With demonstrations scheduled for tomorrow and Saturday, we will soon know whether this movement has real believers among its members and the Iraqi population, or whether it is just posturing by some parties prior to negotiations for the new government. So far, we are inclined to think there is a big element of bluff that will only change if the street turnout surpasses their expectations. End Summary

12. (C) On December 22, PolFSN attended the second and final session of the parties objecting to the current election results. This group, which includes Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National List, Tawaffuq, and National Dialogue, issued a hard-line statement called a "Pact of Honor" under the name MARAM (Arabic for the acronym "Movement to Reject Fraudulent Elections"). Attendees included Naseer al-Ani from the Iraqi Islamic Party, Hassan al-Bazazz, an professor at Baghdad University, part of Tawaffuq, Saad al-Janabi and Ibrahim al-Janabi from former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's National Iraqi List, and Salih Mutlak from the National Dialogue Front. Tawfeeq al-Yasiri from the Sun of Iraq and Sungul Chapuk from the Iraqi National Congress also attended.

13. (SBU) The "Pact of Honor" announced the following demands: (a) a total refusal and cancellation of the "forged" preliminary electoral results or else the signatories would boycott the national assembly; (b) formation of a new international committee to investigate the violations and preparations for a new election; (c) suspension of the work of the Iraqi election commission (IECI) and (d) calling a national conference from which a new national assembly will emerge.

WE ARE SERIOUS

14. (C) TNA member and Allawi candidate Wijdan Salim, who attended the session, told PolOff December 22 that the demands are very serious. She said Iraqis are not happy about the election results, particularly in Baghdad. Given what they heard from their election observers, they believed they had won 17 seats in Baghdad, and not the 8 that they have won to date. She said they do not believe the IECI will do anything due to its alleged association with the Shia Alliance. They therefore want an international team to investigate. She said there would be a demonstration in Baghdad December 23, and later others across Iraq. She said the Maram group will continue to meet on a regular basis.

15. (C) Hassan al Bazazz, an University of Baghdad professor, told PolOff the decisions of the group were serious. He noted that if the IECI commissioners do not resign, some of those in the group might reluctantly accept the IECI's results in time, but a vocal minority of "trouble makers" would persist. Al-Bazazz said there was clear, widespread documentation of fraud in the election, and "several groups" had presented their evidence to the IECI. He added that leaders from the December 22 session were meeting that evening with Ashraf Qazi, envoy to the United Nations Secretary General to Iraq, to voice their complaints.

16. (C) Shaykh Abdel Nasser al-Janabi of the National Dialog Council and the Tawaffuq Front told PolCouns night of December 22 that the threat of a boycott mentioned in the Maram communique was real. He claimed that much of the Sunni street was angry; it could not believe that the Shia had such a large share of the population as to win more than half the votes cast in Baghdad. PolCouns commented that the Maraam demand for an international team to come investigate the election results was premature if the UN team in country hadn't even finished its own investigation. Janabi agreed, and was pleased to learn the final results of the elections are unlikely to be released before the end of the first week of January. (His impression was that the Shia Islamists were pushing for a fast announcement of final results.) PolCouns cautioned that boycotting the next parliament would be unwise. Janabi did not argue, but he said it would be hard for him to justify to "the street" accepting the results.

OR IS IT JUST SO MUCH TALK ?

17. (C) Ala'a Makki, the Political Director for the Iraqi Islamic Party, cautioned PolCouns that while the IIP had attended the Maram meetings and signed the communique, it did not feel bound by its demands. When PolCouns pushed on the folly of a boycott of the election results, Makki immediately agreed. Salih Mutlak and Allawi aides had written that language, and it did not reflect IIP thinking, he stated flatly. He also agreed that an international investigation was premature, again blaming Mutlak for the hardline tone of the communique. Makki confirmed other reports we had heard of a demonstration planned in the Yarmuk district of Baghdad for December 23 after prayers. He underlined that the Sunni Arabs are not seeking a clash with Iraqi security.

18. (C) Saifaldin Abdurrahman, Chief of Staff to Hajim al-Hasani, the Speaker of the TNA and Allawi list candidate in Baghdad, told PolOff late December 22 that Dr. al-Hasani is taking a wait and see approach. This source said Hasani does not think it is a good idea to boycott the Council of Representatives. Abdurrahman believes the threats to be empty.

IECI UNFAZED AND STAYS THE COURSE

19. (C) The IECI appears unfazed and has no plans to change its present course of action. UN Commissioner to the IECI Craig Jenness told PolOff late December 22 that the IECI will continue investigating complaints, with particular emphasis on category red complaints that, if the allegations are proven to be true, could impact the election results. He also stated that the IECI conducted an unofficial last-minute analysis that compared the Baghdad data from this election with the results of the October 15 referendum. The IECI found that the 22 percent "no" vote in the referendum was nearly identical to the projected percentage of votes cast for Sunni Arab parties in the election. Since complaints raised to the IECI by this coalition were largely focused on the Baghdad results, Jenness pointed out that the analysis suggests consistency among the Sunni Arab voters for the referendum and the election. This leaves these aggrieved parties little, if any, leverage to support their argument of widespread fraud in Baghdad.

Comment

110. (C) Our sense is that the Maram group has many signatories, but some are far more committed than others. The IIP, sensing it is on the verge of entering the National Assembly in a serious way, is far less eager to take a hard line. Even some of the Allawi allies, like Hajim al-Hasani, are reluctant to plunge ahead too far, too fast. By contrast, Salih Mutlak (a true rabble rouser) and people around him are driving this. We know that the IIP strongly dislikes Mutlak. Ayad Allawi's team may be more willing to ally, at least temporarily, with Mutlak and his ex-Ba'ath allies. If this Maram movement grows more serious, the most obvious pressure point is Allawi and his team. In the meantime, we expect some vivid television pictures on December 23, but we should also remember that not all the Sunni Arabs are convinced this is the right path. So far, we are

inclined to think there is a big element of bluff in
this Maram movement that will only change if the
street turnout surpasses their expectations.
KHALILZAD